



Onsite Wastewater Management Systems (OWMS) Septic Tank System

A Guide for Home Owners and Occupiers

Onsite Wastewater Management Systems (OWMS) are designed to treat the sewage generated at your property from bathrooms, kitchens and toilets etc for safe disposal within your property boundary for the protection of the occupiers health (public health) and the environment.

As a landowner, occupier or renter with an OWMS you have legal obligations under the *Environment Protection Act 2017* and accompanying *Regulations* which create the General Environmental Duty (GED) applicable to all Victorians.

These responsibilities include:

- operating the system correctly,
- making sure it does not overflow,
- maintaining the system in good working order (this does not apply to renters), and
- notifying the City of Ballarat as soon as is practical if there is a problem with the system.

In addition, Landowners must also:

- provide written information about how to use the system to the person in management or control of the system (for example a renter), and
- keep maintenance records (and provide them to City of Ballarat upon request).

There are two types of systems:

Primary treatment systems (septic tank or worm farm, with wastewater discharging into absorption trenches) or a Secondary treatment system (wastewater treatment plant or sand filter, with wastewater discharging into subsurface irrigation lines or absorption trenches).

Check your City of Ballarat permit "Certificate to Use" or manufacturer's instructions to see which system is installed and any maintenance requirements. Alternatively, contact City of Ballarat Environmental Health Unit for further information.

How to look after your Onsite Wastewater Management System to prevent failure:

- Refer to manufacturers instructions and any maintenance requirements. Servicing requirements may also be found on the EPA compliance certificate for the system.
- Use only reputable, suitably qualified service technicians for servicing maintenance. Keep service records as City of Ballarat may request them.

In the house

- Don't connect a spa or swimming pool to your system if it has not been designed to take the hydraulic loading and approved by City of Ballarat.
- Restrict the use of germicides (such as disinfectants & bleaches) as they will kill the microorganisms (microflora) in the system which break down (decompose) the solids and domestic waste produced.
- Use detergents that are low in salts, phosphorus and chlorine.
- Don't flush nappies, cotton buds, sanitary napkins or condoms down the toilet as they cannot be processed by the system and will cause failure.
- Minimise the amounts of oils and fats discharged to the septic system (i.e. flushed down the kitchen sink).
- Use a sink strainer to limit food scraps being flushed into your septic system.
- Avoid overloading the system by spacing out water usage (i.e. by using the washing machine at different times to the dishwasher. Alternatively, install water saving fixtures).



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In and around the septic tank and on the wastewater disposal field (absorption trenches)

- Ensure no structures, pavements, driveways, patios etc are built over the septic tank or the wastewater disposal field.
- Restrict heavy livestock, vehicles and machinery from accessing the wastewater disposal field.
- Only plant grasses or shallow rooted salt and nutrient tolerant plants near the system. Roots from larger plants may damage or compromise the onsite wastewater management system including the wastewater disposal field.

How to detect system failure “warning signs”

- sewer like odour coming from the system and/or wastewater disposal field (including wastewater distribution pits).
- toilets and sinks drain very slowly,
- blocked fixtures with sewerage flowing from the overflow relief gully,
- wastewater surfacing (pooling) near the disposal lines,
- presence of dead or dying vegetation or lush green growth downslope of the wastewater disposal field,
- inspection pits and/or wastewater disposal lines consistently exhibiting high water levels, or
- general waterlogging around the wastewater disposal field



1. Absorption trenches failing.
(aboveground discharge, mosquitoes)



2. Solids in distribution box.
(potential for system blockage)



3. Lush vegetation growth from system failing to retain wastewater.



4. Damaged septic tank.
(Odours, mosquitoes, water ingress leads to failure)

What to do when your system has failed?

- Check when your septic tank was pumped out last, it should be done at least every three years
- Contact your local plumber or City of Ballarat Environmental Health Unit on 5320 5500 for advice and required action.